

March 8 & 9, 2025

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## In and Out of the Wilderness:

### **God Hears**

Exodus 2:23-25, Luke 10:23-37

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Scripture Reading:

*<sup>23</sup>After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Their cry for help rose up to God from their slavery. <sup>24</sup>God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>25</sup>God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them. (Exodus 2:23-25)*

In today's scripture reading, God took notice of the Israelites - he heard their groaning, heard their wailing, heard their cry.

A number of years ago, a really good friend of my wife's marriage was ending. This was nothing that she had imagined could ever happen to herself or her family. She had two young children. As they moved through this, she tried to save the marriage. She tried to do lots of different things, but it just wasn't going to happen. And she went into a deep, dark place. My wife and their other friends know about this, but didn't know what to say or how to help. I talked to my wife about this and said, maybe you should just reach out and see how she's doing.

A lot of us as human beings, we hesitate in situations like these and say to ourselves, well maybe she's just busy or maybe there's something else going on, or maybe someone else is helping them. We can come up with all kinds of reasons to not make that phone call. But when we got home, my wife did make the phone call and about an hour later her friend came over and they sat on our couch together. They might have been watching a couple Twilight movies or something. And then I heard conversation, I even heard a little bit of laughter, I heard a little bit of hope, a little bit of healing, a little bit of wholeness in that moment.

What we didn't know until this friend came over was that when my wife had made the phone call to her, this was the first weekend she was going to be without her kids because of joint custody, and she had never been without her kids. And that when my wife made the phone call, this friend was in her house with all the lights off, in the kitchen, in the dark, on the floor, rolled up in a fetal position and was just wailing. Her phone was on do not disturb, but of course, when the phone rings, the light came on. And that's what my wife's friend noticed, was the light. And she reached out, and picked up that phone.

As I read today's scripture and as we continue to move through this sermon series, I do believe that God spends a lot of time calling God's people into this kind of work of compassion and restoration. God hears our cries and then he sends people. He sends people into those moments to bring some light in the midst of the darkness.

Last week we ended our time in Genesis on a high note. We ended with this beautiful story of reconciliation with Joseph and his brothers coming together and reconciling. All of Jacob's family and all of Joseph's brothers settled in Egypt and they had it really good. They started out with really good with land they were able to grow. This family grew bigger and bigger and more powerful even after Joseph and his brothers died. They were there for generations and for generations they grew. They became mighty warriors. They became amazing farmers. And after a while, everybody that knew the back story of these Israelites were dead. But because they were getting to be stronger and stronger and more and more populous, more and more successful, a new pharaoh took notice and said, we've got to do something about these people because if they continue to get stronger and stronger and more and more populous and more and more successful, they might just take over our whole land. And so Pharaoh orders his people to enslave the Israelites.

As we move through this Lenten series, we're going to be moving through Exodus, and I invite

you to listen to the podcast because we'll go a lot deeper into all the history and the context. Here's just a brief thing I'll share with you about what was going on - Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites and made them build a city. It was a city that was used to store food. Back in that context, in those days, they would build entire cities to protect the food. So, he enslaved the Israelites, made them build these storehouse cities, and then made them fill these cities with their food.

It was getting very bad for them, and so they began to wail, groan, and cry. And God heard their cry. So God gathers some people to go and respond. God calls a guy named Moses. Now we think of Moses as the exact right person to do the job, because we've seen the story of Moses in Exodus. We've seen it played by Charlton Heston and we've seen it see it with Disney and it's become a movie. We've almost fictionalized these characters in this whole story.

What we're going to do in this series, is to rehumanize these people who we've kind of caricatured and we're going to live into their humanness, because Moses wasn't necessarily the best person for the job. Moses was a murderer. Moses killed somebody in Egypt and was wanted there. He also had a speech impediment. So God is going to send this guy, who has a speech impediment, to have this argument with Pharaoh about Pharaoh's power? Moses says no, I'm not going to do it, I'm not the right person, you've got to send somebody else. And God said no, you are the right person and they had this argument. And of course, finally, Moses ends up going to the people. He traveled there and as you walk through this story over the next couple of weeks, we're going to see what unfolds and how human this story is.

This is a human story because it continues to happen over and over and over again as Jesus teaches his disciples. In the Gospel of Luke he's having an argument with the religious leaders and the religious leaders are asking Jesus who's my neighbor. Actually, what they're asking is who's in and who's out. Who's part of us and

who's not part of us. Who does God love and who does God not love? Whose cries does God hear, and whose cries does God not hear? That's what they're asking. So Jesus tells them a story- a story of a man who is walking home one day and he gets beaten up and robbed by a band of robbers and he's left for dead. And then a religious leader walks by, and another, and another one. People that are supposed to know and trust the story. The people who are actually supposed to stop and hear the cries of this beaten man and give him help, but they don't do it. They ignore the cry.

Along comes a Samaritan – the Good Samaritan. But you have to realize, in those days there were no good Samaritans in the eyes of the Jewish people. In their eyes there were only bad Samaritans. The Jews of the Samaritans were ancient enemies. The Jews and Samaritans did not get along, and the Jews thought of themselves as much higher than the Samaritans. The Samaritans were the ones that were wrong - they were worshipping wrong, they were unclean, they were the sinners.

And God says this Good Samaritan hears the cry and stops, he picks up this beaten man, takes him to get healed, and he saves his life. Two unlikely characters that God uses in the story of us and God to respond to the cries of those who were wailing, Moses and the Samaritan. A lot of times when we hear these stories, we put ourselves in the Moses spot, right? We put ourselves in the Samaritan spot. We even have a Good Samaritan law in places - if you don't stop, you're going to get in trouble. That's how we see ourselves as the Moses and the Samaritans. And I think that is part of the story - God is calling us to hear the cry of those around us and to respond. But sometimes it's hard, sometimes we don't. Like my wife, we hesitate. We hesitate thinking I don't know if they really want our help. Should we actually help, should we step in or not? And maybe you're nervous about it, but you can start really, really small and realize sometimes it's not going to go the way you thought it would go.

As I live my life, I try to do lots of little things. I remember one day, years ago... I dropped my kids off at soccer practice and I had to figure out what to do with that hour and a half. I noticed that there was an ALDI grocery store. I'd never been to one so I wanted to check it out as everybody talks about this store. As I get into the parking lot, I get out of the car and I'm watching this little old lady as she's putting her groceries away and then she's taking her cart and she's pushing it back to the store. So I think to myself, I'll be a Good Samaritan. Those that are laughing know exactly what happened. Those that aren't laughing, here's the deal. In order to get a cart from ALDI, you have to pay a deposit. You pay 1/4 and then you can get that cart and then when you bring the cart back you get your quarterback. It is a big deal. I didn't know that. I'm the Good Samaritan and take her cart back for her. What I didn't know (which many of you probably do), is that when you check out the cart, you pay a 25 cent deposit and you get that deposit back when you return the cart. So as I took this cart from this lady, I thought wow, I just did a really nice thing! But, when I get in the store and I look out the window and I see her and she's still in the parking lot, frozen, standing there. She's stunned and I'm thinking to myself, you know, maybe no one has ever done anything nice for this lady, and I did, I feel good. And then I took the cart back and I realized I stole this lady's quarter.

So sometimes trying to be the Good Samaritan doesn't always work out. But I think God calls us into those moments because there are people living in darkness all around. We don't even know their name. There are people all over the place dealing with all kinds of stuff, and all they need is just a little bit of light. Need Moses to come, they need a Good Samaritan to help. They need just a little bit of light. And it may be someone ending up on your couch watching twilight movies and then having conversation and a little bit of laughter. Or it might be something very, very small. But they're looking for that light.

But here's the other side... as human beings, we're really good at not asking for help. We're

professional at not asking for help from people. We stuff it in, we keep it in. We don't want to bother anybody. No one needs to do that. Maybe you might even think, well this is something I just have to struggle my way through. And you may be right now, metaphorically or even physically, laying in the darkness on your kitchen floor in a fetal position. My encouragement to you is to ask for help. Talk to a friend. Talk to somebody. You don't have to hold that by yourself. There's a Moses out there waiting for you to ask. There's a Good Samaritan out there waiting for you to ask. And these are all normal people. Don't hold it in. Ask for help. We struggle doing that, but just know that as you are in that darkness there is a light. There's light for you.

One of the reasons why we were starting this worship series with this particular sermon at the very front end of a journey of Lent that's going to take us 40 days is because my encouragement to all of us. Is to think. Where are those dark places in your life? Where can you reach out for help? And it may take you 40 days to get to the point to where you can ask. As we move towards Easter, as we move toward resurrection, not resuscitation, but resurrection it might take you that long. It took that long, or even even longer for the Israelites as they left Egypt to find a new way. It's hard. It's not easy. But maybe over these next 40 days and after we hit Easter, maybe you can get to a point where you can ask somebody for help. Because there is that light waiting for you.